**FIRST STEPS TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Session 4 of 4

# Wise men

### MEETING AIM

To hear the story of the arrival of the wise men, coming from afar, and to reflect on yet more surprises in the Christmas story.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 2:1-12

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

There are some nasty aspects to the story of the wise men which we will not be focusing on today. But there are several more surprises which will conclude this series on the Christmas story.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Greet the children by name and share any refreshments you have brought. Ask the children, who has had a birthday present recently, or an early Christmas present? How was it wrapped up? In paper, a cloth, in a box, an envelope, a bottle? Comment that toddlers are often more interested in a present’s wrapping paper rather than the present itself. Is anyone any good at guessing what is inside a parcel? Sometimes we can, sometimes we can’t.

### PLAY – 10 mins

**You will need:** newspaper pass-the-parcel; music and the means to play it; two twigs or sticks

Before the session, create a pass-the-parcel, using plenty of newspaper for each layer to bulk out the parcel. Wrap the two twigs or sticks in the middle (which later in the session can be bound together to make a cross).

Play the game and then wonder about what the two sticks might mean.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** a large star; three boxes (preferably wooden); the two twigs or sticks from ‘Play’; string; gold chocolate coin; perfume spray;

Gather the children together and tell this story:

In a faraway land there were some wise men who studied the stars. They noticed a star that rose in the east and was moving away from them towards the city of Jerusalem. They knew about the king of the Jews whom everyone was expecting. Hold up the star.They decided that they would have to follow the star to find out where it was going. Would the star lead them to this king?

At night-time they travelled. In the daytime they rested. The star kept going. *Move round holding the star, encouraging the children to follow you.* On and on towards Jerusalem. At last they saw the city walls of Jerusalem. The star stopped over the city.

“Hooray,” they thought. “We’re going to find this king.”

But King Herod, who was a bad king and lived in Jerusalem, didn’t like the idea of there being another king. He told these wise men to keep on following the star, which was still moving.

On and on they went. *Move the star.* Then the star stopped! It stopped in a small town called Bethlehem. It stopped over an ordinary house. They went inside. Here they saw a mother and a father and a boy who was a toddler. This was Jesus. This was the king they had come to look for. This was no ordinary king. They were amazed to see him.

They gave him three gifts. *Take the boxes and ask children to open them, commenting on the ‘wrapping’.* Inside one box was...a gold coin. Who wears a gold crown? Jesus was going to be a king, but not the sort of king who wears a gold crown. Inside another box was...frankincense, sweet-smelling perfume. *Spray some, being careful not to direct it specifically at any child.* Sweet-smelling spice was burned to remind people that God hears prayer. People were going to pray to Jesus. Inside the third box was...a perfume called myrrh which was used to rub on someone after they had died. *Inside this box are the two twigs.* Jesus was going to die. He died on a cross. *Bind the twigs together with the help of a child if possible.*

The wise men then set off home, but they did not go back through Jerusalem, they went another way! They didn’t want to see bad King Herod again.

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, ensuring everyone has the chance to contribute:

* There are many surprises in the Christmas story. What surprises did you see? The wise men expected the star to stop in Jerusalem, but the king they were looking for was not there. They were surprised that the star stopped over an ordinary home. Mary and Joseph were not expecting the wise men to visit them. They would have been surprised at the gifts the wise men brought.
* Part one of the story of Jesus is about his birth which we celebrate at Christmas. Part two comes at Eastertime. What do the children think about that? Some of Jesus’ followers were surprised that Jesus died on the cross. They thought he was a fierce king. They were even more surprised that Jesus came alive again.

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** six-pointed stars cut from card, 10cm high, with a slit from one of the points to the centre of the star; glitter thread or wool; sticky shapes; glitter glue; shiny paper; glue

Decorate two stars on both sides, slide one star’s slit into another star’s slit so that they meet at the centre. Attach thread to the 3D star so that it can hang on a Christmas tree.

As you work, chat about what God is doing in the story. Have they discovered something new today?

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** stars from ‘Creative time’; song words and Advent ring instructions from NexGenPro

Light the fourth candle on the Advent ring and remind children about the story behind the first three. You may think of lighting the fifth (Christmas Day) candle if you have not already done so. Sing all the verses of the song.

Everyone stands up and holds their tree decoration, swinging their moving star. Pray this prayer, encouraging the children to say: “Thank you, God” with you.

Thank you, God, that the wise men followed the star. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that the star led the wise men to where Jesus was. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that Jesus was born. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that Jesus died and came alive again. **Thank you, God.**

Thank you, God, that we can celebrate Christmas! **Thank you, God.**

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